

JFK Autopsy Specimens Gone Since '66 Inventory

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Body-tissue specimens gathered during President John F. Kennedy's 1963 autopsy disappeared from a locked National Archives trunk three years later and are still missing today.

The mystery of the Kennedy specimens — including what one former Secret Service official recalled as "a portion of the brain" — was revealed with the recent public release of thousands of previously secret documents related to the autopsy.

Kennedy's personal physician, Adm. George Burkley, initially took possession of the specimens from the three autopsy surgeons. Government documents show he turned them over on April 26, 1965, to Kennedy's former secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, who was then helping organize the late president's files at the National Archives.

Burkley prepared an inventory listing nine categories of items delivered to Lincoln. She signed a copy of the inventory, attesting she had received all nine "in Room 409, National Archives, Washington, D.C." Robert Bouck, the Secret Service official long in charge of ferreting out potential as-

sassins, signed the document as a witness.

A new inventory was taken in October, 1966, when Kennedy's family gave the material to the government. Assistant Secret Service Director Thomas Kelley — who headed the service's investigation of the assassination and was one of the few law-enforcement officers to interrogate accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald — later wrote a memo describing that inventory.

"A key to the foot locker was produced by Angela M. Novello, Secretary to Senator Robert F. Kennedy," Kelley wrote. "When the foot locker was opened, it was found to contain articles No. 1 through 8 listed in the inventory prepared by Dr. Burkley on April 26, 1965. A careful search was made in the Archives to ascertain what happened to the articles described in Item No. 9 of Dr. Burkley's inventory and they cannot be found in the Archives."

Item No. 9 included numerous tissue sections, blood smears taken at various times during Kennedy's life, the original autopsy report and seven

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copies, Secret Service reports on X-rays and photographs taken at the autopsy, and a "stainless steel container 7" in diameter by 8" containing gross material."

In 1977, during an investigation by the House Select Committee on Assassinations, Bouck told committee investigators: "It seemed to me a portion of the brain was preserved." His recollection, he said, was that "it was the brain" inside the stainless steel container.

Immediately after the discovery that the materials were missing, Kelley's memo said, he asked Burkley to discuss the disappearance with Evelyn Lincoln. "Mrs. Lincoln told him that all of the material he turned over to her was placed in a trunk or foot locker; that it was locked, and that, to her

knowledge, it was never opened nor the contents disturbed by her," the memo said.

Interviewed by House committee investigators in 1978, Lincoln said Robert Kennedy and Novello had access to the foot locker during 1965 and 1966. "Mrs. Lincoln says she has no idea what happened to the missing autopsy materials, but believes the Kennedys had a 'sense of history' about these materials," a committee memorandum said. "She said she had no idea who might have come into possession of them or what would have been done with them."

Other documents dealing with the autopsy reflected that Robert Kennedy and his sister-in-law Jacqueline Kennedy feared that some of the medical specimens might fall into the wrong hands and be exploited. Most of those known to have had access to the missing specimens are now dead.